

Bancroft council learns of mystery emails

By Tony Pearson

Last March, Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins sent a private email to Progressive Waste Solutions, a for-profit waste disposal company, asking what price the town might get if it tried selling its waste site. Jenkins said such a sale might help bring down the deficit and debt which Bancroft continues to run up on its sewer operations.

However, for unexplained reasons, the e-mail went out on the town's calendar e-mail account. Later, it ended up being delivered to Councillor Charles Mullett, who brought the matter to Mayor Bernice Jenkin's attention as a possible breach of protocol. In the end, this wasn't pursued; the town's IT people will investigate how the e-mail went astray.

As serious issues continue to mount, the growing workload on senior town staff has prompted the hiring of former interim CAO Steve Silver as a consultant to the current CAO. Silver will work on a new public works building, protection of Clark Lake (the source of the town's drinking water), and undefined personnel issues. He is scheduled to attend the next council or committee of the whole meeting.

A town hall meeting is being planned for November. The meeting will discuss how to raise more revenue for the town. That doesn't necessarily mean a tax increase; it could simply be more user fees, or even "road tolls" for heavy trucks and equipment.

There was good financial news in the continuing fall of Ontario Provincial Police charges to the town - in the order of \$180,000. As it is, the town will still pay over a million dollars next year to the OPP.

George Eastman, head of the North Hastings Community Centre board, was granted \$100,000 from the federal government toward the cost of replacing the arena's roof. That leaves another \$100,000 to be fundraised, which the centre will do. However, it must shortly pay for the arriving steel and therefore could consider bridge financing from firms like S3 Capital to get them over the cash-flow gap. Board member Tracy McGibbon pointed out that this arena is one of only a handful in Ontario that is self-sustaining financially. Staff will prepare a report for the next council meeting.

Another financial need may be a co-ordinator for town events. The Bancroft Business Improvement Area (BIA) will no longer organize the Wheels, Water and Wings (WWW) festival. It suggested that "a third party" take over the supervision, not only of WWW, but of a series of special events, to take place in every season of the year. It offered to provide guidelines for the effective management of such events, and to prepare a request for proposal to engage a year-round events co-ordinator. Council will discuss the idea at a special meeting in the near future.

Meanwhile, a special committee of council will review the process which led to the decision to take over the blue box recycling program. Deputy Mayor Jenkins felt this was important, given that the Greenview Environmental report which set the process in motion didn't have adequate financial information, and wasn't reviewed by the town treasurer. Looking down the road, the committee, which Jenkins will chair, will try to develop guidelines for a model for making such decisions in future.

The other main issue before council concerned the development of trails at the Eagles Nest. Bancroft Trails Committee chair Peter Whitehead reported that a work-bee had been scheduled for the weekend, but that the town (which owns the land) was having concerns about insurance coverage of participating volunteers. In the end, insurance was obtained through the stewardship council. The trails committee also wants the Eagles Nest area to be designated as off-limits to motorized vehicles like ATVs. Mayor Jenkins was worried about how it could be enforced. Councillor Barry McGibbon suggested that "tasteful" barriers could be put up, which would allow access for emergency vehicles. In the end, staff was directed to prepare a report on this suggestion.

Finally, in an attempt to speed up decision-making, council decided to change the monthly meeting of committee of the whole into a second full council meeting. Timing will be decided at the next meeting.